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Postgraduate Conference 2011

Posters and Presentations

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<http://www.dur.ac.uk/anthropology.journal/vol18/iss1/mughal.pdf>

3rd Annual Anthropology Postgraduate Conference 2011

Department of Anthropology, Durham University

Collingwood College, 16 March 2011

The annual postgraduate conference has become one of the most awaited and fascinating events at the Department of Anthropology. It provides an invaluable opportunity for the postgraduate students to evaluate the proposed abstracts, co-ordinate with administrative offices, and organising the event, all as an independent team. The 2011 conference offered a wide range of interesting presentations representing all the sub-disciplines of anthropology being researched at Durham. There were also a few students from other British universities who presented their research, widening the scope of the event beyond the local boundaries.

The fifteen presentations were divided into four plenary sessions at the day-long conference. The first session hosted the papers related to the concepts of geographies, space, proximity and mobility in anthropological discourses. This theme is, indeed,

overwhelmingly becoming an important conceptual framework in social and biosocial studies. As the first paper of the day, Joseph Owen discussed the huge morphometric variations in wild and domestic wild boars within their geographical ranges. To follow, Catherine Owen (University of Exeter) argued about the uniqueness of democracy in Russia; the socio-economic lives of the people living in borderline areas were discussed by Johanna Mitterhofer. Similarly, Gareth Hamilton in his paper illustrated the contested representations of personhood and businesses in Halle an der Saale, an eastern Germany city, employing a rhetoric culture theory.

The second session focusing on research methods in anthropology started with Ely Rosenblum (University of London) discussing the methodology utilised by French filmmaker Vincent Moon to film musicians in Paris. Research reviews and ethics committees are an important concern when carrying on anthropological research. Rachel Douglas-Jones presented a critical analysis of ethics committees. Charlotte King and Caroline Walters, while detailing the marriage practices and community structure in Thailand and mathematical modelling respectively, highlighted the common constraints and prospects of different research techniques for studying social values and human behaviour.

The third session included researches on human body. Frances Thirlway explored the social and psychological contexts of smoking, while Sally Atkinson shared the methodological insights into neurodegenerative diseases research addressing the recruitment of participants for the study. Lyn Robinson presented breastfeeding interventions to support the maternal lactation physiology in a North Eastern England's hospital. In the fourth and last session studies on issues related to international development, ecological conservation, and human rights were presented. Michele Fontefrancesco analysed the cultural effects of economic crisis in Valenza, Italy. Sam Williams and James Howard discussed the ecological impacts in Savé Valley Conservancy in Zimbabwe and coral reef fish trade in Sri Lanka, respectively. Pastoralist adaptations to resource scarcity in Northern Kenya were discussed by Carla Handley, to show how inter-personal conflicts are directly related to environmental degradation.

There were more than ten posters displayed at the conference on a wide range of topics. During the shorter coffee breaks and especially during lunch time, participants informally discussed with the presenters about their investigations and admired the innovative techniques and designs of the posters, often inquiring the poster presenters about their experience of research.

The day reached its acme with the prize distribution ceremony. The best posters and talks presented at the conference were selected by merging the response of a panel of expert anthropologists and the general vote of conference participants. The expert panel comprised of Dr Jamie Tehrani and Dr Rachel Kendal. Charlotte King's paper received the Best Study Design award while Rachel Douglas-Jones's paper was awarded the Best Researcher. Lyn Robinson's paper won the Best Presentation Prize by popular vote. Similarly, Aurang Zeb Mughal's poster on Pakistani calendars was awarded the Best Study Design, while Hervey People's poster on the evolution of religion was given the Most Innovative Research Idea award. Claudia Aufschnaiter's paper on indigenous people's subsistence through tea production won the Best Poster Prize by general vote.

Head of Department Professor Bob Simpson shared his reflections on the conference and research environment at the university with the audience. He also encouraged students to share their research and experience of writing up using different media especially the online forum of Writing Across Boundaries, born out of a collaboration between ESRC, the universities of Durham and Newcastle, and Researcher Development Initiative.

Posters

Temporal rhythms of change in Pakistan: Ethnographic insights from calendars

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Every culture has its unique temporal rhythm that shapes the whole social organization; therefore, changing patterns of temporal models are one of the several indicators of social change. Present day Pakistani culture has its roots into the millennia old Indus Valley Civilization and it has undergone lot of socioeconomic change alongside continuity. Changing notions of temporal models tell the story of religious conversions, post-colonial cultural and political re-configurations, migrations, and economic shifts from seasonal agriculture to market. Studying the temporal models in villages in Pakistani Punjab through the replacement of one calendar with other and changing use of calendars provide an understanding of people's preferences among the alternate goals for development.

The study has been carried out in a village in Pakistani Punjab which due to urbanization phenomenon provides a picture of social change. This poster presents how the Muslim converts started to use the Islamic Hijra calendar for religious reasons in India. However, they continued to use the Vedic (ancient Indian) calendar for agricultural purposes over centuries as it was a solar calendar as opposed to Islamic Lunar Calendar. During and after the British Raj in India, Muslims found the Gregorian calendar as an alternate for Vedic one to adjust with the shift from seasonal to market economy and with the government businesses. Gregorian calendar was adopted in the cities far earlier than the villages because of differential dependency on agricultural cycle and detachment from historical links with Hinduism.

Just change – from poverty to power-tea

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In the capitalist market system most of us find ourselves in today overdeveloped and underdeveloped societies are equally dependent on imports and exports. Neither the

producer nor the consumer, but the investor, i.e. capital, gets to decide the terms of trade. Fair Trade has come a long way in improving these terms for hitherto exploited producer communities. But what about disadvantaged consumers?

How can both regain control over their local economies? Might it be possible to create a new economic system that goes beyond Fair Trade; a global trading network that directly links producer, consumer, and investor communities in a socially just and mutually beneficial economic relationship?

Just Change, an initiative originating in an Adivasi (“indigenous”) community in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu, South India, tries to do just that. Where has this quest for long-term survival and economic self-reliance led this community? Has it been able to plug some of the leaks in the bucket and how is it “Just Changing” India and the UK in the process? And what has all this got to do with tea?

This investigation into how everyone can make a living and no one a killing will attempt to answer some of these questions. Just Change Nilgiri Equal-tea will be available for purchase.

Subsistence and the Evolution of Religion

Hervey C. Peoples, PhD Candidate, Durham University

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We present a cross-cultural analysis showing that the presence of an active or moral High God in societies varies along a continuum from lesser to greater technological complexity and subsistence productivity. Foragers are least likely to have moral High Gods while pastoralists are the most likely. We suggest that belief in moral High Gods was fostered by emerging leaders in societies dependent on resources that were difficult to manage and defend without group co-operation. These leaders used the concept of a supernatural moral enforcer to manipulate others into co-operating, which resulted in greater productivity. Reproductive success would accrue most to such a leader, but the average

reproductive success of all individuals in the society would also increase with greater productivity. Supernatural enforcement of moral codes promoted productivity, maintained social cohesion, and allowed for further population growth, all of which gave one society an advantage in competition with others.

Presentations

Migration, marriage and maturing societies: Community structure in prehistoric Thailand

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As anthropologists we recognise that migrant populations, marital restrictions and post-marital residence choice play a major part in shaping the world's societies. These phenomena are occurring in the present, but were also highly significant in the past, creating great civilisations and providing the template for the world today. It is not easy to study these complex behaviours when subjects are no longer living. Instead of ethnographic observation and research into known genealogical relationships this study relies on evidence for genetic relationships and prehistoric mobility contained within the human skeleton. Here we examine the cemetery sample of one of the major archaeological sites in North-eastern Thailand, Ban Non Wat, to give insight into community changes from the Neolithic period (c. 1750BC) through to the Iron Age (c. 500AD), clarifying how society in this area evolved from egalitarian hunter/gatherer populations into a prominent outpost of the Angkorian empire.

Scaling the elephant and elephant-ing the scale: Blind men's perspectives, ethics committees, and analytical disappearances

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In a parable told by the Buddha, men who have been blind since birth are asked by an Emperor to describe what an elephant looks like in order to settle a dispute about the nature of reality. Each is given a different part of the elephant's body, and with each differing answer, the partiality of the accounts and futility of asserting one knows (or could

know) the whole becomes obvious. In my research on ethics review committees, the story was used to describe how the perspectives of auditors were blended together, so that the committee could be fully known: a whole to be assessed. In the recent work of Cook, Laidlaw and Mair on the other hand, the tale is used to dissuade anthropologists from pursuing holistic imaginaries in multi-sited work: their question is “what if there is no elephant”? This paper suggests that anthropologists are to the objects we study as the blind men are to the Emperor’s elephants: purveyors of partiality. Thus it becomes analytically interesting not to ask at what scales elephants, organisations and ethics exist, but consider how scaling effects are used by our informants. To elephant a scale is to query its analytical naturalness, to ethnographically show what social work it does, and how. In analyses, scales are often explanatory. Here, they are forced into appearance, and disappearance. Melding anthropological work on scale and perspective through ethnographic observation of each at work in Asian ethical review NGO work, this paper investigates the scaling of elephants, and tries to perform an elephant-ing of scale.

Promoting breastfeeding interventions on the postnatal ward that support maternal lactation physiology

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Background: Despite global infant feeding policies, a vast majority of mothers fail to conform to current recommendations to exclusively breast-feed their infants until six months of age, reasons often attributed to the economical and cultural barriers presented by living in modern day society (i.e. maternal need to return to work). However, little research has concerned itself with how current postnatal practices (where mothers ‘room-in’ with their infants) may interfere with or disrupt the evolved physiology of lactation and effect this can have on breastfeeding outcomes. This presentation will discuss the results of two united research studies aimed at promoting breastfeeding interventions on the postnatal ward that support maternal lactation physiology and breastfeeding outcomes .

Research Studies: (1) The North-East Cot Trial: a large randomised controlled trial comparing the effect of two different infant care conditions: (standard postnatal care vs. side-car crib: a three-sided bassinet that attaches onto the mothers bed) while on the postnatal ward on breastfeeding duration. Follow-up data were collected weekly for 6 months postpartum via an automated telephone system. (2) The Role of Prolactin in Breastfeeding research, a pilot study investigating the impact of side-car crib on maternal hormone levels (prolactin) while on the postnatal ward and subsequent breastfeeding longevity. Data were collect via: fingertip blood spots before breastfeeds; daily diaries; and telephone follow-up interviews.

Conclusions: Research results could potentially demonstrate that current postnatal practice undermines maternal lactation physiology which subsequently restricts breastfeeding duration.
